**Africa RISING research co-learning workshop**

**7 – 9 March 2013**

**Lilongwe, Malawi**

(additional comments from Carlo Azzarri responding to RO1 activity proposal at the end)

**Workshop objectives.**

* Ensure that we have a common, clearly articulated vision for the program
* Articulate the assumptions and approaches of the research teams and the experimentally significant scales at which they will be working
* Identify divergent assumptions, approaches, and scales (the other side of the coin of Obj. 2)
* More fully utilize broad range of skills and experiences of program participants to strengthen all research teams (develop clear pathways to ensure continued strengthening)
* Identify skill gaps (e.g., anthropology, social science, economists) and determine how to fill them and/or leveraging other projects/experts
* Ensure that the outcomes, results are written up and communicated

**Wednesday, 7 March**

1430. Review of January Accra meeting & presentation of agenda – Jerry Glover

* genesis of Lilongwe meeting
* identify note-taking, plan for reporting out, posting on wiki site

1500. Tanzania strategy and discussion – Jerry and Mateete

1600. RO1 proposed strategy – Jereon Groot and Lotte  Klapwijk

1800. General discussion

1830. Adjourn

**Thursday, 8 March**

0830. RO1 proposed strategy – Jereon Groot and Lotte  Klapwijk

1030. Break

1100. General discussion

1300. Lunch

1400. Research activity simulation--Malawi – Jerry Glover

1600. Break

1615. Discussion of RO2 & RO3 -- Mateete, Asamoah, Peter

-- review hypotheses

1800. Adjourn

**Friday, 9 March**

0830. M&E implications -- Beliyou

0930. Develop protocol and body for program-wide input, consensus, information dissemination, etc.

* Senior management team responsible for dissemination of information within research teams or management bodies; provides advice and guidance; seeks to develop consensus on and standardization of protocols, strategies, etc.
* Need to minimize lengthy emails but ensure adequate informed consent on important issues
* First stop for raising issues
* Identify add’l outside experts to address technical issues
* Ensures focused integration and/or interaction with other relevant programs/projects
* Proposed participants?:
* IFPRI: Carlo Azzarri, Beliyou Haile
* IITA: Irmgard, Mateete, Asamoah, Bernard
* ILRI: Peter Thorne, Ian Wright (what about Peter or Ewen—non-public site on wiki?)
* MSU: Regis Chikowo, Sieg Snapp
* USAID: Jerry Glover, Tracy Powell (more of an observational role)
* ICRISAT?
* Others?

1000. Additional USAID related news/issues

* Development of larger Sustainable Intensification program:
* Africa RISING, CSISA, Sust. Intens. Innovation Lab, IPM Innovation Lab, Small-scale irrigation program (US university led in cooperation w/ AR and IWMI)
* Vital Signs – BMGF-funded, Cons. Int’l implemented—data collection, knowledge management
* Stan Wood and Kate Schneider
* USAID mission relations—updates and improvements?
* Mali situation re: USAID funding seems to be improving—implications for AR?

1030. Communicating workshop results/decisions—put as much up on the wiki site as possible

* Discussion notes
* Outcomes/decisions
* Supporting documents
* Follow up actions

1130. Need to develop a longer term calendar—events we can put on the calendar?

Comments from Carlo Azzarri (IFPRI) responding to RO1 activity proposal:

Bernard’s plan looks good to us if we would like just to look at the farm through the farming system lenses, but we think that farms and their actors are part of the bigger world in which they operate. What is this plan after? What does it seek to determine? What are the questions it is set to answer?

 Anyway, in the document it is written, under the strategy: ”In summary, a baseline survey, allowing the construction of structural farm typologies, would be followed by a rapid farming system characterization exercise, allowing the development of functional farm typologies, and a detailed characterization farming system description, allowing complete farming system diagnosis. This information would then be synthesized and analyzed toward the exploration of system innovations and system redesign, ready for testing and evaluating under RO-2”.

 So, it looks like this plan is just for RO-1, not RO-2, 3 and 4, which to us are the most important to assess the impact of Africa RISING. In other words, the farming systems analysis cannot replace the impact evaluation. It is just to build a model for some simulation scenarios. Is this correct? Please let us know the rationale and objectives of this plan, as it is difficult to provide an opinion without having some more background information. This plan just looks at RO-1, while with baseline, mid-point (eventually), and follow-up we will be evaluating the impact of the activities, so all the ROs, not only RO-1.

Of course this does not mean that we should not do farming system analysis. On the opposite, we think we should go ahead with it, to which we will gladly contribute and collaborate with our partners and CG centers. This analysis would definitely enrich the information we have on those systems. What we simply think is that it is not designed to solve the impact assessment problem that we are facing in Africa RISING, for which we have unanswered questions. Beliyou is putting together a short summary of the evaluation challenges in Africa RISING that we hope to prepare before the end of the week and send around for comments. This would also be helpful ahead (and in preparation) of the Malawi discussion.

 We still think that, for many reasons highlighted in the upcoming evaluation summary (and in previous e-mails), a rigorous, reliable, quantitative impact assessment of the research activities (especially field activities) in Africa RISING is not possible given the current situation and conditions. What we can effectively do is Monitoring and Evaluation, with the latter intended as evaluation at the project level through outcome mapping, cost-benefit analysis, IRR, ROR, simulation exercises using farming system models, but not impact evaluation. If this is something acceptable to USAID, this certainly falls under our capabilities, tasks and responsibilities. That is, we should certainly follow the route of farming system modeling, but being well aware of its strengths and limitations. For example, we would not rely on the FS modeling as for the scaling out of research activities, and for assessing the impact, as it is depicted in Figure 1 of the plan. The jump from the farm models to the scaling out and the impact looks like a jump from the cliff and we are set up for failure if we simplistically (and mechanically) looked at those issues the way it is done in the proposal. Scaling out will only be based on a simulation model, on self-selected farmers with some peculiar characteristics in very specific and limited locations. On which basis can these simulation results be extended to other farmers, with different characteristics, in different locations, etc. if a careful sampling design has not been conducted? Will we make the (heroic and highly questionable) assumption that all farmers in whatever universe we think at the scale-out will be the same as the farmers Africa RISING is working with? And how from this naive scaling-out results will we make the transition to the impact, without looking at the farmers who are not exposed to any activity? How can the Africa RISING farmers be considered as representative of all the farmers in the “scaling-out universe”?

In any case, as far as the baseline survey is concerned, we would be very careful in saying “It is thereby important to consider having a relative large number of households in a relatively small number of `villages’ rather than vice versa”, as this clashes with the sampling design for an impact evaluation. Again, if we decide not to conduct impact assessment, we can interview as many farmers in as many villages as we deem appropriate. Nonetheless, for impact assessment, the sampling should be such that a maximum of 15-20 households in a village are selected for the interview. This is for the simple reason that farmers in the same village are very likely to share similar characteristics, so any additional farmer exceeding the 15th (roughly) would bring just a negligible new piece of information in addition to what already brought by his/her 15 peers. On the opposite, farmers from different villages are unlikely to share similar characteristics, so they would bring more richness and diversification to the dataset, that is more “signal” rather than “noise”. So, we’d say the opposite: “It is thereby important to consider having a relative large number of villages with a relatively small number of households selected for the interview rather than vice versa”. It is not only the number of farmers that matters, but how close they represent the universe of the other (non-sampled) farmers.